



**PERSPECTIVES**

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## **Malaysia: The Return of an Anti-Semitic Prime Minister**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The 92-year-old Muhammad Mahathir has come out of retirement to become Malaysia's prime minister once again. In his 2003 welcoming speech for the Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, he said the Muslim world was in a frontal confrontation with the Jewish people. The most extreme inciters against Jews and Israel have for many years come out of the Muslim world. Mahathir's 2003 speech and the applause he received from political leaders from the 57 Muslim states present is a prime example of major Muslim anti-Israel incitement.

Ninety-two-year-old Muhammad Mahathir has come out of retirement. He has won the Malaysian parliamentary elections and become the country's prime minister once again.

Mahathir has a long record of extreme anti-Semitic statements. One in particular stands out because it was made at a gathering of almost all the Muslim countries. Both his statements and the reactions to it are worth recalling. They provide insight into what has happened since that time to both Muslim states and communities and the complex attitudes of Western democracies towards them.

In October 2003 in Putrajaya, Malaysia, the Tenth Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) took place. It was attended by leaders of 57 states. Mahathir, who was then prime minister of Malaysia, attacked the Jewish people and the West in his welcoming speech.

Mahathir represented relations between Muslims and Jews as a worldwide frontal confrontation. He said:

1.3 billion Muslims cannot be defeated by a few million Jews. There must be a way. And we can only find a way if we stop to think, to assess our weaknesses and our strengths, to plan, to strategize and then to counterattack. We are actually very strong. 1.3 billion people cannot simply be wiped out. The Europeans killed six million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them.

Mahathir went on:

We are up against a people who think. They survived 2,000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by thinking. They invented and successfully promoted socialism, communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong and they may enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have now gained control of the most powerful countries and this tiny community has become a world power. We cannot fight them through brawn alone. We must use our brains also.

The essence of Mahathir's speech is a mutation of the extreme anti-Semitic Tsarist fabrication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Referring to the West, Mahathir said, "We are all Muslims. We are all oppressed. We are all being humiliated. We control 50 out of the 180 countries in the world." One recognizes here the mythology of the widespread Muslim victim culture. Many Muslim inhabitants of oil-rich countries are extremely well off. If some Muslims are being humiliated, it is being done by other Muslims.

Worse still, in the past decades hundreds of thousands of Muslims have been murdered by other Muslims, in some cases in wars between Muslim countries. The Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s is one example. Many hundreds of thousands more have died in civil strife. This is the ongoing reality in Syria.

The importance of what happened in 2003 went far beyond the statement of a major Muslim inciter. As the *Washington Post* observed in a piece about Mahathir's speech and the standing ovation it received,

Mahathir's clique included Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, our guy in Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, and even Russia's Vladimir Putin, representing his country's large Muslim minority....But what corrupts and enfeebles large parts of the Islamic world is not Jews in either New York or Tel Aviv, but its own self-serving and inept leadership – in other words, some of the very people who stood and cheered the speech.

The EU had a summit scheduled at the same time as the OIC conference. It was proposed that a condemnation of Mahathir's remarks be included in the nineteen-page final statement. According to *Haaretz*, the draft stated: "His unacceptable comments hinder all our efforts to further inter-ethnic and religious harmony, and have no place in a decent world. Such false and anti-Semitic remarks are as offensive to Muslims as they are to others."

Despite their checkered past toward Jews, the Europeans could not reach unanimity on this strong condemnation. French center-right President Jacques Chirac opposed the words, as did socialist Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis. This was despite the fact that Mahathir had undertaken an all-out attack on all Jews with no protests from the leaders of any Muslim states.

It was thereupon decided that the Italian president of the Council of the European Union would put a statement on its website saying the EU "deplored the comments made by President Mahathir." It also said: "Such words hinder all our efforts to further inter-ethnic and religious harmony and have absolutely no place in a tolerant world." This would, of course, be followed by years of weak European responses to extreme Muslim anti-Semitic incitement.

Mahathir trapped Chirac by thanking him for blocking the EU Summit Declaration that had intended to deplore his speech. Chirac, who did not want to be exposed publicly as condoning extreme anti-Semitism, replied to Mahathir: "Your remarks on the role of Jews provoked strong disapproval in France and around the world."

Clear words were delivered by the US a few days later when President George W. Bush met Mahathir at the Asia Pacific Summit in Bangkok. Bush told Mahathir that his words were "wrong and divisive," adding, "It stands squarely against what I believe." (Mahathir denies that Bush rebuked him.)

This was hardly the first time Mahathir had made extreme anti-Semitic remarks. In 1986, at a meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, Mahathir said,

The expulsion of Jews from the Holy Land 2,000 years ago and the Nazi oppression of Jews have taught them nothing. If anything at all, it has transformed the Jews into the very monsters that they condemn so roundly in their propaganda material. They have been pupils of the late Dr. Goebbels.

In 1997, Mahathir claimed his government was afraid the Jews were planning to destroy Malaysia's economy as well as that of other Muslim countries. At the 1999 Davos economic conference, he blamed the Jews for Asia's economic problems.

The most extreme inciters against Jews and Israel have long come out of the Muslim world. Mahathir is a prime exemplar of this unfortunate tendency.

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